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Review

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Takale: Bakar-Praputnjak Dry Stone Walls

Over the Bakar Bay, below the village of Praputnjak, spread the dry walls of the Takale terraces, where the people of Praputnjak cultivated vine and produced excellent indigenous sparkling wine Bakarska vodica. Since wine growing had been neglected over time, a demanding and ambitious project of revitalization of stone terraces and vine planting was initiated in 2001. The goal was not only to preserve tradition and restore a lost segment of economy, but also to attract tourists. Praputnjak's specificity is the fact that, due to men's absence, women played the main role in the vineyards. The old wine growers of Praputnjak told their stories, talked about their way of life and the knowledge of wine growing, happy that the project has been initiated, but also sceptical toward new practices and modern wine-growing methods.

Key words: wine growing, Takale, Praputnjak

Covering the largest part of the steep and inaccessible terraces of the Bakar Bay, today covered with forest and shrubs (*makija*), there are remnants of old dry stone walls (*gromače* or *prezidi*), which have been used for wine growing since the second half of the 18th century.

Right here, under the settlement Praputnjak, beneath the old Caroline's Road, in the area of *Takale* (*Takala*), on July 18, 2007 the presentation of the famous *Bakarska vodica* was held, after this top-class Praputnjak sparkling wine has been neglected for decades.¹ That date also marked the launch of the protected brand "Stara bakarska vodica", natural sparkling wine produced on the basis of initial fermentation of new, not fully fermented, wine.

¹ With economic changes, industrialization and the global deruralization trend, dry stone walls and vineyards have been neglected and the production of Bakarska vodica sparkling wine was taken over by "Istra-vino" factory.

The many terraces in the area – Letovo, Dobra, Lovrinovo, Stiminovo, Čićićevo, Mandrija, Gornje Črno, Dolnje Črno, Punta, Rebar, Takala, Komorica, Smilj and Križ, are today mostly abandoned. However, the maps from the second half of the 18th century show that even then there were vineyards in some of them.

On the plateau, behind the Gradina (Crni Vrh) massif there were *završki* vineyards, and the southern slopes below Gradina and above Bakar were the locality of the *belina* grape vineyards for producing the wine *takalac*. These southern slopes have been producing *Bakarska vodica* from *belina* for about 200 years, as “home industry”, “folk custom” and “women’s work”.

The *Cultural and Social Association Praputnjak* was founded in the year 1998. Two years later its members launched the project and program called *Revitalization of Bakar-Praputnjak Dry Stone Walls*.

Since 2001, the recovery of old stone terraces and planting of wines was initiated, with the support of the local agricultural cooperative *Dolčina*, local, county and state institutions, for the first time since the year 1956 when the vineyards were neglected and abandoned.

In the first phase, the revitalization of dry stone walls and recovery of vineyards was done on Takala terraces mostly owned by residents of Praputnjak and, to a lesser extent, of Hreljin. The project is based on a 15-year lease, which allows the planting of *belina* slips across one hectare out of the planned 7-9 hectares and between 1,500 and 30,000 seedlings. This should be expanded to over 14 hectares in the future.

Since I was a part of the project of cataloguing the collections of ethnographic objects in the Bakar municipality, together with a group of students from the *Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Department* within the *Croatian Ethnological Society's Summer School* and in cooperation with the *Chakavian Assembly Department Ljubo Pavešić*, the events surrounding this initiative encouraged me to learn more about the phenomenon of dry stone walls and wine growing, as well as of the life of farmers in this area.² My informants were mostly Praputnjak locals who described in detail their life and work in the field, which was mostly based on wine growing. I looked up other relevant data in the available references.³

The start of intensive wine growing was encouraged by Empress Maria Theresa in the second half of the 18th century. By clearing land and planting vines the Praputnjak serfs became landowners and were freed from paying all taxes for five years (Tadejević, 1990: 291). They made significant profits producing wine and cutting

² I received support from Professor Dr. Djakovic and museum advisor Ivan Sestan, and I was also exceptionally welcomed by the locals, who were interested in the ethnographic heritage of their region. Ms. Jadranka Ajvas and Ms. Dusanka Maracic were of great help.

³ Old wine growers in Praputnjak, who had spent most of their lives working hard in the vineyards, are still skeptical and do not share the enthusiasm of “official” project initiators, claiming that the new technology is not in line with the traditional production of *Bakarska vodica*. Still, they are satisfied with the fact that their dry stone walls will at least partially be brought back to life.

wood. The informant states that the *Takale* slopes where vines for producing sparkling wine were planted were named after the rolling (“takanje”) of wood trunks down to the sea, where they were loaded into sailboats and shipped to Venice (informant 4).⁴

The fact that women had a leading role in wine growing was not especially highlighted, despite the fact this was a truly unique phenomenon. This can be primarily explained by the migration and economic situation in the past centuries.

In the 1870s the people of Praputnjak started emigrating to the USA, where there was a growing demand for cheap labor force in modern industry. Significant emigration waves of men in search of jobs headed towards Malta and the Suez Canal (1858-1869). Many went away as sailors or got jobs as *kalafati* – carpenters and shipbuilders, in shipyards across the world (Tadejević, 1990: 286). Because of that the proportion of sexes in Praputnjak was extremely unbalanced for decades: in 1890 there were 168 women on 100 men, in 1910 171 women, in 1921 159 women, in 1948 160 women, and in 1953 145 women (Tadejević, 1990: 286).

The disruption in the population structure also reflected on everyday life, i.e. the distribution of agricultural jobs. Since they were unable to rely on the help of their husbands who were working abroad, women also took over jobs that had usually been the part of the male domain. Informants point out that the women of Praputnjak were very bright and smart, as they managed the work around the house, the household and children, vineyards, planting, sprinkling with sulfur, spraying, as well as processing grape, work in wine cellars, selling wine etc.

Children were brought up with a firm hand, but more attention was paid to female children. Nine- or ten-year old girls did most of the house chores, took care of their brothers and sisters or helped out in the fields. Although they “worked like men”, women were taught to be diligent, so they paid special care to cleanliness and order in the house (informant 4).

Although men were often absent, women gave birth to many children: “husband would come home in the summer and a child would be born in nine months“. While men worked in the field, they would carry them lunch, polenta, milk, coffee, etc. (informant 4).

Men did more physical work, such as digging, building dry stone walls, reaping etc. (informant 5). They carved stones and used them for building dry stone walls. The Bakar terraces were built over four or five generations of Praputnjak residents, between the late decades of the 18th century and the early 20th century. It has been estimated that, considering the terrain configuration, a single worker can build 1.5 cubic meters of dry stone wall in eight hours. Considering the fact that dirt was often carried over from the mountains, the amount of time needed goes up by 20 percent (Tadejević, 1990: 295).

⁴ *Takala* (*Takale*) is also recorded as a toponym in Istria (as a beautiful cove near Raklje), and it is also the name of a village in central Bosnia, near Žepče.

Most families owned a certain area of a vineyard. Fertile land was brought over from karst valleys in the mountains. Women would carry soil on their backs in big baskets, to vineyards that sometimes reached all the way to the sea.

The growing of grapevine species in Praputnjak was adapted to the terraces and windy locations. The types of growing included: *koltar*, *baras* and *ruža* (Štiglić, 1981: 137).

Koltar is a type of growing with a single row on a terrace with one pole and two wires. Vegetables or fruit trees, such as figs, were often planted in between the *koltar* rows.

Baras looks like low single or double pergolas or arbors 2 meters wide without leaning on a regular or dry stone wall.

Ruža is a type of pergola leaning on the regular or dry stone wall on one side.

Considering heat and drought, the form of *baras* and *ruža* blocked sun rays from reaching the soil and drying it out.

A combination of planting and growing grapevine on the slopes towards the Bay is the result of tradition, as well as of the position, exposed to permanent insolation, rain and gusts of northern wind and salty water.

Grapevine is planted 40 cm below the surface, it is tied up in February and cut between November and February. Stakes and poles (*les*) are prepared in autumn: stakes from oak or acacia and poles (*ostilj* or *sulja* and *prešnjica*) from pine trunks and ash branches. For tying they used *žukva*, a type of willow used for tying up the *tapalj* – vine trunks and *rozge* – the saplings. The youngest saplings (*mlaje*) are also tied with lime-tree bark bands.

Vineyards were earthed up using pitchfork or triangular pick, two or three times a year. The hardest work was the earthing-up under *baras* and *ruža*, as it was done in a kneeling or sitting position.

June was the time for pruning – cutting off fruitless saplings, while August was the time for *skudnja* – rooting out weeds (*haludina*).

The Praputnjak vineyards also suffered great damage from grapevine diseases (oidium, phylloxera, peronospora) in the second half of the 19th century so *šternice* (containers) for blue vitriol have been built, for spraying the vineyards.

Trgadba, grape picking, was a family event of great importance. It was appointed by the Bakar town magistrate in agreement with district judges from Učka in mid-September, early in the morning. No picking was allowed prior to that day and violators, who feared losing the harvest due to hailstorms, got their grapes confiscated and sold publicly (Zakarija, 1999: 330). The mood was joyful and festive and the inner family was also joined by cousins (informant 5). Clusters were carefully selected. The best ones were left for *Bakarska vodica - belina* (which reminds of the French *sauvignon*) and *vrbačka žlahtina* (which originated from the French *chablis*).

The picking was preceded by extensive preparations, when it was necessary to *razadnit* (remove the bottom of a barrel), *zadnit* (restore the bottom), *nabijat* (tighten the hoop),

namakati (soak), *sumporit* (clean with sulphur) and *bromulat* the barrels, *kade*, *brente*. *Bromulanje* is in fact steaming, which was done by putting *venuka* – vine, fig, walnut, cherry or peach leaves into a barrel. It was then poured over by hot water and the barrel was closed. This way the *brombul* removes the unpleasant odor from the wood.

Grapes were brought home on backs, in *brente* (wooden containers) and *kofe* (baskets) or stored in barrels (*karteli*, *bordulezi*) and transported by carts. The *mast* (grapes) was crushed by feet in a *kartel* or *groto* (containers for crushing grapes). Grapes for sparkling wine were put aside and *samotok* (liquid) was separated from solid parts by pouring it through a conical wicker basket. After the settling and alcoholic fermentation, must was filtered into glass demijohns where it ripened in phases until December and February, when *vodica* was bottled.

According to folk stories, the art of producing the “Praputnjak Champaign”, natural sparkling wine, was probably brought here by French soldiers during Napoleon’s rule, or Bakar ship-owners through their business contacts with the French.

Since the largest part of the job lied on women’s shoulders, each housewife knew the process of making *vodica* in detail, so the tradition was kept until 1929, when the sparkling wine production became regulated by the “Wine Act”. In Praputnjak surroundings about two hundred *belina* vines survived until the end of the 20th century.

Only richer families could afford to produce larger quantities of *vodica*, as it requires more investment and effort, but other households also tried to provide it at least for festive occasions. White wine (white *par* – “žlahtina”, “verdić”, “gustošljen”, “brankovac”, “belin”, “vrbić”, “beli muškat”) was more appreciated and produced in larger quantities for sale, while red wine (red *par* – “plavac mali and veli”, “brajdica”) was mostly drank at home or used for dipping bread. Most of the sparkling wine was kept in wine cellars until autumn and then sold. The families that desperately needed the money sold the sparkling wine earlier. The wine was spared: at home after lunch they used to drink wine with water (*bevanda*), while sparkling wine was set aside for sale or for special occasions (informant 4).

Those who had a lot of wine and were unable to sell it would get a license for selling wine from a barrel in their own or leased premises. At the so-called *matica*, which was particular to Praputnjak, both women and men sold wine, but in smaller quantities, from one to several liters (informant 4). Sometimes, for example on St. Joseph’s Day (*Jožefovo*), an occasional fight would break out between men who had too much to drink (informant 5).

Women often worked in *žurnade* (daily work, paid per day). They would reap hay, work in vineyards for richer families, or worked as servants in houses, sometimes living with these families for years. The women of Praputnjak mostly went to Bakar, which was the residence of many rich maritime families (informant 5).

Although the Praputnjak terraces spread across the Bakar Bay and are today often called the Bakar vineyards, the people of Bakar, unlike the Praputnjak locals, lived urban lives and did not grow wine, but mostly used to buy it. A certain local

antagonism between the two had always been present. The people of Bakar were mostly rich mariners and the people of Praputnjak (especially religious women) saw their women as “women of loose morals”, calling them “Caponi”. On the other hand, people of Bakar called the Praputnjak locals “Vilani” or “Završani” (mock name for peasants) (informant 2).

By mid-20th century, the largest part of the Praputnjak estates was farmed and this was the main source of income for the local population. Today they are deserted, which was the reason for launching a demanding project of the revitalization of wine growing, mentioned above, but also the growing of vegetables in Dolcina (Vičević, 2003: 203).

Among other things, the idea behind the rehabilitation of wine growing is to modernize the growing technology, making it more purposeful and cost-efficient when compared to the former methods, which had put an enormous strain on the farmer. The plan is to do this through improved and innovative work conditions, such as earthing-up using motor cultivator, removing weeds using various chemical agents, *malčiranje* (green fertilization using motor lawn mower), protection using advanced preparations against wine disease, drop-by-drop irrigation, motor devices, cutting using electric scissors, etc. (Vičević, 2003: 231, 232). Experts hope for a more efficient production of the authentic *Bakarska vodica* (and other types of wine) based on modern technology (Vičević, 2003: 233).

However, as I have already pointed out, many people of Praputnjak are skeptical of the revitalization project and its modern methods. These are mostly old, experienced wine makers who are satisfied with the efforts for the rehabilitation of the abandoned land, but are also convinced that the project will not be successful (informants 1, 3). The informant whose family belonged to larger wine growers had several remarks. For example, that the digging can only be done by human hand, since motor cultivators pull out the rootlets, that grape vines are planted too shallow and threaded by shoes instead of boots, that birds attack the vineyards and there's no one to protect them, that grape clusters are dry, that their *belina* used to be thick and today it's not, and as good as the new dry stone walls look nice, there are no more people willing to do this job, because two persons need to work in Takala each day. She concludes that the old high quality *vodica* no longer exists (informant 3).

It is a fact that the knowledge and experience of the old Praputnjak wine growers demanded much more time and effort, which is not commercially viable, while advanced trends of modernization intensify growing based on other grounds.

Perhaps today's “Praputnjak Champagne” has identical chemical properties as the old one, but the latter had gotten its final, essential touch by the subjective feeling of a special value - the knowledge that the farmers invested hard everyday work in it, worrying about the weather and disease, while today's mechanization takes over a significant part of this job.

Whether the old wine growers are objective, influenced by nostalgia and idealization, or realistic, is the question to be answered by experts and time.

However, regardless of the expected disagreements between the advocates of traditional and modern methods of growing and production, it is clear that with the revitalization of the Praputnjak dry stone walls, this area, with its visible and recognizable landscape values, becomes a kind of a monumental tourist attraction, especially because the plan also includes the wine road with walkways and tasting in domestic taverns.

Narrators

1. Ajvas, Jadranka, born in 1957, Praputnjak
2. Antić, Alma, born in 1926, Praputnjak
3. Cibić, Ljubica, born in 1933, Praputnjak
4. Mavrić, Blanka, born in 1933, Praputnjak
5. Miloš, Vladimir, born in 1923, Hreljin

Translated by Ivona Grgurinović